

1908.
NEW ZEALAND.

NATIVE LANDS AND NATIVE-LAND TENURE:

INTERIM REPORT OF NATIVE LAND COMMISSION, ON NATIVE LANDS IN THE UREWERA DISTRICT.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Native Land Commission, Rotorua, 13th March, 1908.

To His Excellency the Governor.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We have the honour to submit an interim report of the Native lands in the Urewera district, which is in the County of Whakatane.

The Commission held a brief meeting towards the end of January at Ruatoki, and met a section of the Tuhoe Tribe.

The Urewera Native District Reserve contains approximately 646,862 acres, and is subject to "The Urewera Native District Reserve Act, 1896," and its amendments. The provisions of "The Native Land Settlement Act, 1907," do not apply to the lands in the reserve. The present report is for the purpose of submitting to Your Excellency the views held by the Natives of the district and our suggestions as to the method to be immediately adopted to render available for settlement a portion of this extensive territory.

The Act of 1896 was passed to provide for the investigation of the titles to the Urewera lands, and for the purpose set up a Commission of seven, consisting of two Europeans and five Natives of the Tuhoe Tribe. Their findings were subject to appeal to the Native Minister, who had power to finally dispose of the appeals upon such expert inquiry as he might direct. The Commission sat and made a report, but the Natives appealed against many of their findings. To enable him to come to a determination on these appeals the Native Minister appointed a special Commission of Experts. The investigations occupied from 1897 to 1907, in which year the Native Minister was able to lay before Parliament his decisions, based upon the report of the Special Commission. With the exception of Pukepohatu, a block of 7,488 acres, still papatupu, the owners of the various subdivisions of the Urewera district have been ascertained, their relative interests determined, and the subdivisional boundaries approximately defined. To complete the titles so far as the investigations have proceeded proper surveys are required. The titles, however, are far enough advanced to allow of the Native Land Court exercising jurisdiction in partition, succession, and other cases.

To facilitate settlement and dealing with the lands, there is provision for the appointment of a Local Committee for each block, each Committee having power to elect one of its members to be a member of the General Committee. This General Committee is empowered to deal with all questions affecting the reserves as a whole, or affecting any portion thereof in relation to other persons than the owners thereof. It has power to alienate any portion of the district to the Crown, either absolutely or for any less estate, or by way of cession

for mining purposes. The Local Committees and General Committee may exercise other powers and functions that the Governor in Council may prescribe.

In order, therefore, that the lands in this district may be made available for settlement, it is necessary to constitute the Local Committees, so that the General Committee may be elected to exercise the functions and powers provided by statute. We understand that provisional Local Committees have been appointed, and these hold office until the election of permanent Local Committees at such time and in such manner as the Governor may prescribe. No regulations have yet been framed prescribing the mode of election. The settlement of these preliminaries, the convening and holding of meetings of owners of each block, would occupy so much time that the appointment of permanent Local Committees would be seriously delayed. We have therefore suggested to the Hon. the Native Minister that the provisional Committees should be convened for the purpose of electing a General Committee, and that the election should be validated by Parliament. We made this suggestion because the Tuhoes have offered an area of about 28,000 acres near Ruatoki and Te Whaiti for settlement by way of lease, and it is therefore advisable to set in motion the machinery of the Act as soon as possible. We have received a reply from the Native Department that arrangements have been made to hold a meeting of the provisional Committees at Ruatoki towards the end of this month. An officer of the Native Department and one from the Lands and Survey Department will attend, and after the provisional General Committee is elected the areas for settlement will be defined and surveyed.

In this way we are of opinion that the area offered to us for settlement, amounting to 28,000 acres, and hereafter specified, might be made available for settlement this year. The lands offered were,—

					Acres.
Part of Te Purenga	....	....	....	....	1,000
" Tarapounamu-Matawhero	....	....	....	....	3,000
" Ruatoki No. 2	....	....	....	....	2,000
" Ruatoki No. 3	....	....	....	....	2,000
" Waipotiki	....	....	....	....	2,000
" Parekohe	10,000
" Otare	2,000
" Paraoanui North	1,000
" " South	1,000
" Hikurangi-Horomanga	4,000
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					28,000

We believe that greater areas can be obtained for settlement, and will be offered later on. The Tuhoe Tribe recognises its liability for survey and other charges, amounting to over £7,000, and was influenced by that consideration when offering the above area for settlement.

We have, &c.,

ROBERT STOUT, }
A. T. NGATA, } Commissioners.

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